

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 3, 2011

TO: Policy Committee

FROM: W. Scott Whyte, Senior Landscape Planner

SUBJECT: Development Standards – Landscaping /Designation of Community Character Corridor Buffer Treatments

I. Designation of Community Character Corridor Buffer Treatments

The Comprehensive Plan designates Community Character Corridors (CCCs) on special roads throughout the County, along which projects are expected to have higher development standards than projects that are adjacent to all other roads. Generally speaking, 50' landscape buffers are expected for any commercial development adjacent to one of the CCCs and 150' landscape buffers are expected adjacent to residential subdivisions. The 2009 Comprehensive Plan recommended that the treatment of these buffers should be designated by type (urban/suburban, wooded, or open/agricultural) before projects are reviewed for approval.

Requirements for Community Character Corridors (CCCs) can be found primarily in sections 24-94 and 24-96 of the zoning ordinance and are summarized below.

- Average 50' landscape buffer for CCCs and a 30' wide buffer for all other roads for projects requiring a site plan.
- Quantitative standards for planting the buffers.
- Criteria for reducing the width of the buffer in certain situations.
- 150' landscape buffer along CCCs and 75' along all other roads for most residential districts.

Evaluation of the landscaping ordinance was included in the scope of work item identified as Development Standards. Staff focused on CCC buffer treatments as part of this review, specifically the feasibility of implementing varying standards for the three types. In response, staff has created a map designating the type and buffer treatments for the CCCs and a sample plan for each. The intent of designating the buffer treatments is to give developers a clear understanding of what is expected by the County for buffer treatments before any development plans are made.

II. Discussion Items

A. Designating the three types of buffer treatments

1. Description of Issue/Problem

- *Staff reviewed each Community Character Corridor in the County in order to designate its type/buffer treatment. There are three separate types of CCCs and related buffer treatments suggested by the Comprehensive Plan: urban/suburban, wooded, or open/agricultural. These changes are intended to give the applicant more predictability during the approval process and to provide the County with more consistent and*

attractive buffer treatments. A map showing the different types and treatments of the CCCs has been created and a sample plan showing examples of the three treatments is attached.

2. History/Background

- *Section 24-96 appears to have been first put in the ordinance in 1988; however, the requirements for Community Character Corridor buffers first appear in 1999 and have not been amended. Since the adoption of these regulations, the County has been deciding the buffer treatment desired on a case by case basis. Over the years, this system has resulted in well-landscaped buffers but also in some uncertainty as the County and the developer settle on the desired buffer treatment.*

3. Comprehensive Plan GSAs, public input, and PC and BOS direction

- *CC 1.3 - Designate Community Character Corridors as wooded, urban and suburban, or open/agricultural. Create separate standards and tools for each of the different situations that may occur along Community Character Corridors, including standards and tools for protecting wooded areas, open/agricultural areas, scenic vistas, urban and suburban areas, and other areas as appropriate. Consider adoption of a Community Character Overlay District during the Zoning Ordinance amendment process to promote commercial and residential development that reflects the strategies for preserving and creating community character standards set forth in the Comprehensive Plan.*
- *The language contained in the Comprehensive Plan and areas where the treatments may be applied are listed in section 4 below.*
- *Community Appearance Guide - has many references to buffering. It addresses the need to preserve and enhance Right of Way buffers and the need to limit the visibility of utilities.*
- *New Town Design Guidelines - contain many references to buffering, mostly to screen commercial and industrial uses from residential uses. It encourages the buildings to be placed close to the road to buffer parking and create a town center.*
- *Business Climate Task Force Report - cites preservation of our unique community character as key to attracting potential businesses to the County.*

4. Explanation for Proposed CCC Buffer Treatments and Designations on Map

- **Urban/Suburban CCCs** - *An urban/suburban area is characterized as having high to moderate traffic, commercial, and some residential uses. The predominant visual character of these areas should be the built environment and natural landscaping, with parking and other auto related areas as a secondary component. The buffer treatments should incorporate existing specimen and understory trees, enhanced landscaping, the use of berms and other desirable design features which compliment and enhance the visual quality of the urban corridor. Parking lots should be screened with upright evergreen plantings. This treatment will provide the applicant with the most visibility of the commercial use and the most flexibility in establishing a manicured and or formal look compared to the other two treatments. The areas designated with this type of treatment would be Community Character Areas and other urban areas of the County that have mainly commercial uses. New Town, Five Forks, Toano, Norge, and Richmond Road would be candidates for the urban/suburban treatment. A sample drawing of an urban/suburban landscape treatment has been attached which gives the applicant a visual example of the type of landscape treatment expected, characterized by street*

trees, shade and understory trees, and shrubs. The overall treatment is more formal and replanted than the other treatments, allowing the applicant the most flexibility in creating sightlines and establishing framed views of the commercial operations.

- **Wooded CCCs** - A wooded CCC is characterized as an area that has natural wooded areas along the road with light to moderate traffic, and minimal existing or planned commercial development. The objective of the buffer would be to visually screen the development from the road. Ideally existing vegetation should be preserved or supplemented to create a wooded buffer that preserves open space and wildlife habitat to maintain the natural character of the County. Areas of the County that would be selected for this type of treatment include areas that have existing vegetation consisting of mature trees and shrubs and that have mostly residential uses. Areas of Route 5, Centerville, Longhill, Greensprings, and Route 199 are some of the candidates for the wooded treatment. This type of treatment would offer the least amount of visibility to the development, and the intent would be to preserve the natural beauty of the site. The design should be informal and natural. A sample drawing of a wooded landscape treatment has been attached which give the applicant a visual example of the type of landscape treatment expected, characterized by preserved specimen and mature trees. This type of treatment would be used to screen the development from the corridor, and offer a less formal, more natural look.
 - **Open/Agricultural CCCs** - An open/agricultural CCC is characterized as an area that is located primarily in rural lands where farming and forestal activities are predominant or sought to be preserved. The objective of the CCC designation is to preserve the views and integrity of farm fields and natural open spaces so they remain dominate visual features. This type of treatment would be used for the remaining agricultural areas that exist or historically existed in the County. Areas around Anderson's Corner, Forge Road, and Old Stage Road would be candidates for the open/agricultural treatment. A sample drawing of an open/agricultural landscape treatment has been attached which gives the applicant a visual example of the type of treatment expected, characterized by open fields and preserved sightlines. The intent would be to preserve a portion of the land's original use and preserve the agricultural and rural character of the area.
5. Solutions and Policy Options
- Designate the different buffer treatments as shown on attached map and add more descriptive language regarding treatments.
 - Revise section 24-96 to reference the treatment types built into the map.
 - Add illustrations in the zoning ordinance to graphically show what is expected from the different treatments. (see attached sample plan)
 - Build a new layer in the GIS to track the different types of buffer treatments.
6. Staff Recommendation
- Staff recommends the above changes to the landscape ordinance pertaining to Community Character Corridors. Designating the type of treatment for all the CCC buffers throughout the County would make the regulations in place easier to interpret and make the development process more predictable by letting developers know what will be expected before any plans have been prepared.

III. Conclusion

Staff recommends that the Policy Committee support adding buffer treatment designations to all Community Character Corridors in the County and amending the ordinance and policies as suggested to clarify expectations and receive more consistent, attractive buffers during the development process.

Attachments:

1. Community Character Corridor Map
2. Community Character Corridor Landscape Illustration